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## SPEECH

Robert Mercer ally of the  
 R. M. T. HUNTER, OF VIRGINIA,

OF

ON

*On the resolution of notice to Great Britain to abrogate the convention of joint occupancy relative to the Oregon territory.*

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 10, 1848. *Vol. 1848*

Mr. HUNTER rose and addressed the House as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I was one of those who regretted that this debate should have arisen when it did. I regarded it as premature and unfortunate, and I feared that it might add to the difficulties in the way of a wise and dispassionate settlement of the question before us. But, so much has now been said, that a yet fuller development of the opinion of this House is perhaps due to the country, and ourselves. For myself, I have been the more anxious to express my opinions at an early stage of the debate, because I foresaw that I should be separated from many, perhaps from most of my political friends upon the question before us. I am happy to believe, however, that the differences between us are not so wide and deep as to be irreconcilable. This difference relates not so much to the end which we all desire to attain, as to the means by which it is to be pursued. From what I have gathered of the opinions of this House, I believe that all desire the possession of Oregon, not only up to the parallel of 49°, but to that of 54° 40'. Nearly all, so far as I am informed, believe that our title to this country is good, not only to the 49th parallel, but up to that of 54° 40'. I, for one, entertain that opinion. The whole question between us is as to the best and wisest means of attaining an end which we all equally desire. Mr. Chairman, I have expressed the opinion, that, without regard to the distinctions of party or of sections, all of us desire the possession of the whole territory in Oregon, to which we are entitled. There is no man with an American heart in his bosom who could be insensible to the prospect of planting our flag and our settlements upon the shores of the Pacific. There is no such bosom which would not swell with emotions of hope and of pride at the prospect of the influence, commercial, political, and military, which we should derive from a position on the shores of Oregon and California, should we be so fortunate as to be able to obtain the last by just and equitable means. Looking to the map of the globe, and taking the world over with a view to its social and political relations, and to physical characteristics, there is no such position for military strength and commercial supremacy, as

we shall occupy if our settlements should cover the whole breadth of the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, under our present form of government. In the centre, lies the vast valley of the Mississippi, destined to be not only the hive, but the storehouse of nations, and impregnably secured behind the Alleghenies on the one side, and the Rocky mountains on the other. In time of war, a mighty reserve, ready to debouch on either the Atlantic or the Pacific slope, to overwhelm with irresistible force any foreign invasion, and able in time of peace—teeming, as it will be, with people and resources—to cherish and sustain a vast commerce on either sea. From the Chesapeake northward, our harbors and rivers, communicating with vast inland seas, give us the most commanding commercial position on the vast basin of the Atlantic, which receives the waters and the commerce of most of the large rivers of the world. With Oregon and California, our position on the Pacific would be nearly as commanding. We should hold the advanced posts on the line of commercial interchanges between the civilized portion of the world, and most of that which is semi-civilized or barbarous; and we should probably become the centre of commercial transit between the two seas. The possession of Oregon, and the peaceful acquisition of California, would place this Union in a position of impregnable strength and stable greatness, with one arm on the Atlantic sea and the other on the Pacific shore, ready to strike in either direction with a rapidity and an efficiency not to be rivalled by any nation on the earth.

I know that these speculations on the future are uncertain and often dangerous; but it would seem to be next to impossible that, with this position, and with all these elements of military strength and of political and commercial greatness, we should not be able, not only to command the largest share of the commerce of both seas, but also to protect and advance the march of civilization throughout the entire extent of this continent. With these views of the subject, how could I be insensible to the importance of maintaining our claims to Oregon? But shall we best promote our purpose by adopting the recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Af-

fairs in relation to the notice? With great deference to their matured and, perhaps, better opinion, I must say that I think not. To determine this question, it will be necessary to ascertain, as far as possible, the probable consequences of either course, as we may give, or refuse to give, the notice for the termination of the convention of joint occupancy.

Let us, then, Mr. Chairman, examine this question calmly and dispassionately. Let us view this subject under none of the hallucinations of national pride; let us approach it in no boastful or braggart spirit, and with no disposition to use it as the mere means of flattering national vanity. Let us come to it in that higher spirit which conscious strength should inspire—with the feelings of those who are too well satisfied of our title to the respect of the world, and of our ability to hold our own, to believe that it can either be necessary or dignified to deal in extravagant pretension or exaggerated assertion. If there be such a spirit of inquiry in this body to which I may address myself, I would ask, what are to be the consequences if we give the notice? If the notice be given, the best result which can possibly flow from it will be an adjustment of the difficulty by treaty, upon the basis of a boundary on the 49th parallel of latitude. Under existing circumstances, we can expect no better treaty, and it is manifest that we will take nothing worse. It is absurd to suppose that Great Britain will offer to give us more than we have agreed to take. If this matter be amicably adjusted, it is evident, under the existing state of the negotiations, that we get nothing beyond the 49th parallel. Now, Mr. Chairman, such an adjustment, in my opinion, would be far better than the doubtful chances of a war under the circumstances which at present surround us. But I should certainly prefer the whole country up to 54° 40', if there be means compatible with the peace and honor of the nation, as I think there are, by which we should probably obtain the whole territory. But how do those gentlemen stand who support this resolution as a peaceful measure, and yet maintain that we can take nothing less than our whole claim on Oregon. If the measure be peaceful, is it not manifest that, by adopting it, they essentially abandon the whole country north of the 49th parallel? If they adopt it as the means of obtaining the whole country, they can only do so upon the supposition that it is to lead to war, and that thus we shall obtain the whole. I shall presently endeavor to ascertain what would be the probable consequences under that conjuncture of circumstances. But here I must pause to say, that I do not mean to disparage or disapprove the proposition made by the administration to settle the question amicably upon the basis of a boundary along the 49th parallel. Under the circumstances, and from the course of previous negotiations, the President could have done no less than to have made such an offer. It was due to public opinion at home and abroad, it was due to our national character, and the great interests of humanity, that he should manifest a desire to do much for an honorable peace. The terms which he offered would have been considered by each party to the dispute as falling short of the full measure of their just claims, but in the more impartial, but, perhaps, less informed opinion of the residue of the civilized world, they would have been regarded as fair, equitable, and honorable to both countries. He would have done much, too, for the country in thus securing, by peaceful and honorable means, an advanced post for our population up to the 49th

parallel. He would have acquired, as far as I have been able to inform myself, much the most valuable portion of the country, both for commercial and agricultural purposes. I know that the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs has expressed a different opinion. But with great deference and respect for that opinion, I must be allowed to declare my dissent from it. The opposite opinion expressed by Mr. Greenhow, to whose enlightened researches the country is so much indebted, seems to me to be sustained upon better grounds. The harbor of Port Discovery, of which Vancouver speaks in terms so high, and the harbors on Admiralty inlet, are said to be admirably adapted to the uses of commerce.

As I am informed, they are better not only in natural capacity, but from position, than those higher up on the coast. Of the superior agricultural advantages of the portion of the territory below the 49th parallel, I presume there can be no doubt, and I think they are very generally admitted. The President might well suppose that he would effect much in securing the peaceful progress of our infant settlement in Oregon up to the 49th parallel; and this being done, he might safely leave it to time and American enterprise to do the rest. But, Mr. Chairman, let me return to the inquiry into the probable consequences of giving this notice. I have said that the best possible result would be an adjustment on the basis of a boundary along the 49th parallel; but I have seen nothing as yet to convince me that it was the most probable result. If the minister from Great Britain refused to consider this proposition, when made in the course of an amicable and courteous correspondence, is it very probable that she will be more inclined to accept it when we give the notice, under circumstances which imply that she must either agree to our proposition, or go to war for the whole country? If the British minister represented the real views of his government, is it probable that with their dispositions that government will be the more inclined to accept our offer on account of the threat which it may suppose to be implied by our giving the notice? If she really designs to go to war, rather than compromise upon the terms which we proposed, is there anything unreasonable in supposing that she might think the present time and circumstances as favorable as any likely to occur for striking the blow? If she really attaches the importance to her whole claim on Oregon, which many seem to imagine, and regards a war for it as inevitable, will she not think that the sooner she strikes the blow the better for her? Or if, on the other hand, she is anxious to settle the question amicably, and desires nothing more than terms which may be regarded as honorable by her own people and by the world, will this spirit be conciliated by our giving the notice, and by the circumstances under which it will be given? To sum up the whole, is it not manifest, on the one hand, that if this step should lead to war, we give to Great Britain, instead of reserving it to ourselves, the advantage of choosing her own time for it? If, on the other hand, this be designed as a peace measure, is it not more likely to defeat, than to encourage a renewal of negotiations in a sensitive and high spirited people? Such seems to me to be its probable tendencies; and unless Great Britain should think this disputed territory to be of little value to her, however important it might be to us, and unless she entertains a strong desire for peace, I can see no other result to flow from this notice so



probable as that of war. One thing is perfectly clear; this measure must either lead to a settlement on the basis of a boundary along the 49th parallel, or it must produce war. Our western friends say that they will be content with nothing less than the whole extent of our claim; and if this be so, is not war inevitable, under present circumstances? If war is to be the mode of settling this question at last, it would seem to me that it would be far wiser to preserve the present state of affairs, that we may be able to choose our own time for fighting, and select a period when we were better prepared for the contest, and when the attendant circumstances might be more propitious. Let us look, Mr. Chairman, into the circumstances under which this war would now be waged, and ascertain, if we can, its probable consequences. Have we made any of the military preparations necessary for such an event? Would one, or even two years, suffice for the preparation proper for such a contest? If war be inevitable, is not our internal condition such as to make delay desirable? The whole country is just recovering from a deep financial depression. Many of the States are either unable, or barely able, to pay their own debts. They are not in a condition to bear the weight of internal taxation, which must be one of the main resources of the war. A few years hence, a different and more favorable state of things might be fairly expected. What, let me ask, would be our position in the public opinion of the world? We break off the negotiation because our proposition was not accepted, and we give the notice under circumstances which proclaim that there must be war, unless she will settle the question upon our own terms. She has offered us a mode of settling this dispute, now universally regarded amongst civilized nations as a fair and honorable method of adjusting national controversies—I mean arbitration. This we have already refused; nor do I disapprove of that refusal, under the circumstances then existing. She will probably offer it again, and we shall again refuse it. I do not stand here, Mr. Chairman, as the advocate of arbitration; upon that question I have nothing to say at present; I am merely dealing in facts, with a view to the consequences. We shall again refuse arbitration, Mr. Chairman; and why? Because we say there are none of the nations of the world whose governments are honest and impartial enough to decide this controversy between us. This may all be so; but will a refusal of arbitration for such reasons be likely to win us much of the sympathy of the world? Under these circumstances, am I wrong in supposing that the world will be apt to regard us as the aggressor? The public opinion of Christendom would be thus defied at the time when Great Britain has a better understanding with the continental states of Europe than she has ever enjoyed at any previous period of her history, so far as I am acquainted with it. The "cordial understanding" between herself and France, her ancient enemy and our former ally, is notorious throughout the world. Under these circumstances, what chance should we have for either sympathy or assistance from any of these powers in the event of a war? But this is not the whole view of the existing state of our foreign relations, and its connexion with our prospects in a war. If we have a war with Great Britain about this time, shall we not probably have Mexico also on our hands? It is known that she is sore under recent occurrences, and it is equally notorious that she is much under British influence. We should probably have a war

not only for Oregon, but Texas also. The Indian tribes beyond the Rocky mountains are known to be under the influence of the Hudson Bay Company, and it is probable that most of the western Indians would take sides with Great Britain in the event of a war between her and this country. Under these circumstances, what would become of Oregon, and of our infant settlements on the Columbia? I believe it is the opinion of our best military authorities, and, indeed, the very general opinion, that, during the war, Oregon itself must be abandoned, and that we should have to strike in Canada, and upon the seas. And yet gentlemen coolly demand war, or what will lead to war, as a duty which we owe our people in Oregon, when it is manifest that the very first step of that war would be to abandon them unprotected to British troops, to the Hudson Bay Company, and their savage allies—to a war, unless they at once made terms for themselves, as likely to be signalized by all the circumstances of barbaric atrocity as any of which we have an account. Those unfortunate people might well ask the chairman of Foreign Affairs if this be what he calls "acking of his friends?" In such a contest, is it not probable that Oregon would be lost only to be recovered, if ever, by another war, to be undertaken at a more auspicious period? If this struggle were now to be commenced, I do not believe that there would even be an effort made to send troops to Oregon. It would be regarded as a waste of men and means, at a time when, with Mexico to the southwest, with the Indian tribes on our western frontier, with British and Canadian troops on our north, and with British fleets covering the eastern and southern line of our coast, we should be encircled as with a wall of fire. I doubt not but that we should emerge from it victorious. It is not on the soil which we occupy that we can be conquered, or even be worsted. I have full faith in American spirit and patriotism. But I do not believe that we should pass unscathed through that fiery trial, nor ought we to task too highly those great qualities of our people by exposing them to unnecessary difficulties, as we should do if we engage in a war before we are prepared for it, or if we make war to attain what might be had far more certainly and honorably by peaceful means. That we should come out of such a contest with honor, I do not doubt; but that we should lose as much or more of Oregon than would be given up by any treaty likely to be made, I regard as also probable. If war be the only mode of maintaining our rights in Oregon, that war ought to be deferred, as it is manifest that our chances for success must increase with every year of delay. But if there be peaceful and honorable means (as I shall endeavor to show hereafter) which would more probably give us the whole territory, we owe it to ourselves and to the world to adopt them.

But gentlemen have promised that if war be once commenced with Great Britain, we shall terminate it by driving her from this continent, and depriving her of all that she claims or possesses upon it. I do not stand here, Mr. Chairman, to take issue with that proposition; I mean neither to affirm nor deny it. I will not even ask if "our old men see visions and our young men dream dreams" I will suppose the anticipation to be true; and I shall endeavor to trace such a war as this would be to its consequences, to see if the chance or the certainty of acquiring Oregon a few years sooner, would compensate us for them.

Mr. Chairman, I know of no instance in which a

nation, pretending to independence, and the equality supposed to result from it, has yielded up the whole subject of dispute which had led to the war. There is, it is true, more than one shining instance, in which a nation has conquered its independence without impairing the position of equality of its opponent. There are instances, too, in which a conquered people have yielded all. But I know of no treaty in modern times, between equals, in which one of the parties, after a war, has given up the whole subject in controversy without an equivalent. There may be such instances, but I do not remember one, even in the most successful period of the career of Napoleon. Neither Marengo nor Austerlitz ever gave him such results in his treaties with Austria. Of all the European nations, Great Britain is the most distinguished for the pertinacity with which she has hitherto struggled for her rights and her honor. Now, Mr. Chairman, is there a man amongst us who supposes—does the wildest dreamer of us all believe—that she would ever close a war by yielding not only the whole subject in dispute, but her own undoubted territory until she had first waged it, and been defeated in it, as a war not only of mastery, but of existence? Would her sagacious statesmen be slow to perceive that any treaty which branded her with the visible stamp of inferiority after a war, would be the sure precursor of her downfall? She knows that the hungry and expectant eye of continental Europe is fixed upon the prey which a division of her mighty empire would afford. She is aware, too, that the calculation has already been made as to how far the invention of steam has destroyed the security of her natural defences—of her insular position. She no longer feels able to continue the proud boast that “Britannia needs no bulwarks, no towers along the steep;” for she is now engaged in constructing coast defences. She must feel that the whole charm of her power lies in the idea of her invincibility on the seas and in her colonial possessions. To destroy by her one act this idea, would be to hold forth the signal for the eagles to gather to the banquet, and would involve the loss of power, empire, and character itself. Can I be mistaken in supposing that a war which brought her to such a conclusion, would probably be the longest and bloodiest ever known in the annals of mankind? Gentlemen have promised that this thing shall be done. I do not stand her to dispute it. In the event of a war, I wish that they may be able to make good their words. But before this can be accomplished, we must track the British lion in his blood from the rising to the setting sun. We must hunt him from stronghold to stronghold, until we have pursued him throughout the circumference of the globe. Every sea, every clime must become familiar with the noise of the terrific strife. Far distant people, nations to whom as yet we are scarcely known, must be startled at the apparition of this new power which is to struggle with Great Britain for the mastery in places where she had long reigned the most supreme. From Aden to the Ionian isles we must pursue her over wave and through fortress, on one continuous line of blood and fire, until we have swept her flag from the seas, and buried her fleets in the ocean. We must throw down her places of strength; we must despoil even her gardens of “pleasance.” Yes, sir; to this dreadful extremity must we bring her, before she can agree to conclude the contest upon terms which would destroy her most cherished sentiment of national pride, and probably lead to the

destruction of the mightiest empire which, as yet, the world has known.

If we are to obtain what gentlemen have promised us, such must be the war which we are to wage. What, Mr. Chairman, must be the consequences of such a war upon ourselves and our institutions? Who can foresee these consequences in all their extent, or undertake to measure the results? How great would be the danger of a centralization of all power in the federal government, and of an obliteration of the lines of State authority? How many hundreds of millions of debt should we entail on ourselves and our posterity? How far should we fall into the lower depths of the paper system? To how distant a day in the Greek calends should we postpone those great democratic reforms which we had fondly hoped we were about to introduce, and for which we have labored so long and often with such doubtful success? We should go into the war a free, happy, and moral people. Who can undertake to foretell the extent and nature of the transformations which we may undergo before we come out of it, or who can measure the waste of all the elements of human happiness and social order which such a war would occasion? Should we be justified in the eyes of God, or of mankind, for thus perilling the great interests of our country and of humanity for the sake of obtaining possession of Oregon a few years earlier, when we are sure of acquiring it a little later by honorable and peaceful means? Could we be justified in exposing the country to such extremity if there be even a probable chance of acquiring the territory by means not only peaceful but compatible with our honor? Or if war and such a war be inevitable, ought we not to postpone it until we have more men, more means, more resources, and more auspicious circumstances for its commencement? But, Mr. Chairman, it may be said that in my view of the probable consequences of such a war as that must be which should lead to such a conclusion as is promised, I have virtually admitted that the republican system of policy is practicable only in time of peace. Such is not my opinion. We have not had time as yet to introduce or mature our system. The ideas upon which they rest are not fully possessed by the public mind. They require time and a period of peace for their full development. But if once matured and developed, I believe they would enable our government and people to stand the shock and pressure of war with far greater ease and buoyancy than under any other course of policy. I, for one, am of the opinion that if we were now to plunge into war we should fall into some of the worst forms of the paper system, owing to the remains of what I believe to be a wrong idea once implanted in the public mind; and yet I believe that the expenses of a war could be far better sustained without these abuses of that system than with them. I have long thought that we suffered almost as much in the last war from such abuses as from the British troops. But, Mr. Chairman, I have yet another answer. The genius of our institutions is pacific—they were not organized for distant and offensive warfare. For defensive war I believe they are the strongest in the world, for they bring to its aid the united hearts of our people. We were not organized for a career of war and conquest, and I thank God for it; for then we should have required a far more despotic form of government, and we might have stood as fair a chance as any to become the curse of mankind, instead of being



their benefactors, as I maintain we have been by the example of our institutions and our progress. We have always been proud to believe that ours was a higher and more glorious destiny; we have believed it to be our destiny to achieve our triumphs in the useful arts of peace, to subdue the difficulties and master the secrets of nature, to adorn and cultivate the earth, to introduce a new and a higher civilization, to develop better forms of social and political organization, and to minister to the progress and the universal peace and happiness of mankind by the beneficent example of a free and happy people, who were wealthy without rapine, strong without crime, great without war, and peaceful without fear. Towards these great and beneficent ends we have already done much; and in doing it we have won more true glory than if, like Tamerlane, we had left pyramids of human heads as the monuments of victory, or like Attila or Alaric, the scourge of God and the pest of nations, ravaged and desolated the earth in the storm of our warfare. Our thousand of miles of railroads and canals which have thrown down the barriers of nature to the affiliation of our people, and to the common and kindly interchange of so much that ministers to the happiness of man, are far nobler monuments to the genius of a people than the column of Trajan or the palace of Blenheim. These are the monuments which are worthy our name and our destiny.

But, Mr. Chairman, I return to the inquiry which I was pursuing. I have endeavored to give gentlemen the advantage of their own suppositions; and in whatever way I have turned the tapestry for them, the picture has seemed to be forbidding. But most so in that aspect which gave us the picture of war waged to such extremities as some gentlemen have promised. But is there a real probability that the war would be waged to such extremities by two nations whose powers of mutual annoyance are so great, and whose capacities for mutual benefit are so large? Is it not likely that both nations would tire of a contest so destructive and bloody, and agree to terminate it by an arbitration which, in the universal opinion of the civilized world, is considered a fair and honorable mode of adjusting national differences? Sir, I believe that if there should be war, it will most probably terminate in an arbitration, and thus we should have an arbitration and war, when we might have had an arbitration without a war. Could any man hesitate between such alternatives? But gentlemen here are against an arbitration. I myself wish to avoid it, and I believe this may easily be done by means which most probably would secure us the whole territory in peace and honor. Let us refuse to give the notice; leave the negotiations to stand where they are; for we have now done all that it becomes us to do in the line of negotiation. We have offered a compromise upon liberal terms which has been refused, and we have manifested a proper desire for peace. Let us now rely upon our superior means of colonization. Great Britain has elected to leave the ultimate possession of the territory to depend on our relative capacities for settling it. In this contest, the advantages are on our side, and it must end in putting us in possession of all that we claim. We thus avoid the chance of losing the territory altogether. There are gentlemen, I know, who are disposed to smile at this; but let me remind them that, in comparing ourselves with Great Britain, they must remember that there are some theatres where we are her superior, there are others where we are her equal, and

there are others, again, upon which peculiar and sometimes transient circumstances give her the superiority. In a war for Oregon, at this time, she possesses superior advantages in her long-established and sedulously-cultivated influence over the Indian tribes, in the command of the forces of the Hudson Bay Company which are at hand, and in the facility with which she could transport troops from her various stations on the Pacific. But if we wait a few years, the balance of power must change. Circumstances will cast it on our side as they now do on hers; and in a contest—if contest there must be for Oregon—we shall be found the stronger party in that territory. But it has been said that, if we refuse to give this notice, we shall violate our national honor. How? Has our sensibility on this point been just now awakened? From 1818 to this day we have never felt this joint occupation to be a stain upon our national honor. Has it ever been pretended until recently that it was a disgrace to continue the convention? Is there anything dishonorable in adjourning a dispute, without the least surrender of our rights, and upon terms which give us every chance of acquiring peaceably all that we claim? The other party, with her eyes open, has insisted upon placing the determination of the controversy upon this issue, in which the advantages are all on one side. Is it not a wiser as well as a more moderate mode of disposing of the matter to abide by these terms? Let things remain, then, as they are, and let us pass such measures as may encourage our settlements in the disputed territory without contravening any treaty stipulations. Thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, expended in judicious measures for colonization would do far more for our ultimate possession of the territory, and be far better appropriated than millions lavished on the uncertainties of an unnecessary war. I put it, sir, to considerate western men—to those who desire Oregon more than war—if such a course of policy be not the wisest which we can pursue with reference even to the single end of acquiring the territory which they so much desire. I know that the gentleman from Indiana, [Mr. OWEN,] has said that the Hudson Bay Company would interpose obstacles to our settlement north of the Columbia river, by buying out those of our citizens who attempted to plant themselves on that side. He has mentioned one case in which he has known that to be done. Possibly there may have been more; but is not that distinguished gentleman too well aware of the great laws of trade to suppose that they would long keep up that game? Besides, this is a game at which more than one might play. Does he, or any other man, believe that if our settlements are once firmly planted south of the Columbia the crack of our American rifles, and the sound of the axe of our western pioneer will not, in due time, be heard not only north of that river, but north of the 49th parallel?

But it is said that England will not allow this, and that if this course of policy be attempted, she will ere long give notice herself, and declare war upon us. Let her if she chooses; let her if she dares. She then would become the aggressor, and in such a war we should be sustained not only by our own conviction of right, but by the general sympathies of mankind. It would unite our people instantly and effectually; and with one heart and with one mind, they would rally to the rescue of national rights and national honor with all the advantages of previous preparation, and with the spirit which has heretofore distinguished them. But is it probable

that she would do this? Is she in a position to do it with her own expressed views of the grounds of her title? She claims a right to joint occupation in Oregon under the convention made in 1818, and indefinitely continued in 1827. Whilst this convention continues, she enjoys the joint occupancy by a title to which we assent. Suppose she were to put an end to this convention, she would but revert to her title under that of Nootka Sound, by which she herself claims only a right of joint occupancy, and under which her own commissioners have disclaimed a title to exclusive sovereignty in any portion of the territory. If she were to give the notice to terminate our convention, under these circumstances she would stand in the attitude of abandoning a right which she held by a title to which we assented, to claim it again by another which we refused to acknowledge. She would thus place herself before the world as seeking war for war's sake, and assume the position of an unprovoked and wanton aggressor. In this attitude of affairs, how could she hold up her head in the face of Christendom, or invoke the blessings of the God of battles in a contest which she had so insolently and wantonly provoked? But could she have any adequate motive for so wanton an outrage? She can have no interest in the permanent possession of this north-west coast. She finds far more eligible sites of colonization in New Holland, New Zealand, the Cape of Good Hope, and in the Canadas. These colonies would contribute to the consolidation and strength of her empire. They lie, too, in the pathway of her commerce. She has here territory enough to absorb all her immediate and prospective means of colonization for a century, perhaps for centuries to come. It may be important to her to hold there for a time certain subordinate rights of occupation short of the sovereignty of the country in Oregon. But of what use can it be to her to settle her citizens on the north Pacific coast? It is not in the pathway of her commerce, although it is invaluable to us for ours. She has no back country to supply through the little strip of settlement which she might attempt upon the coast; but we have, and its products seek an outlet by our commerce on the western ocean. But grant that she desires it ever so much; must she not know perfectly well that the thing is hopeless? She may desire it as the means of keeping us out, but with what probability of success? The mighty wave of our population is yearly advancing westward at the rate of half a degree of longitude on a line of more than three hundred leagues. Could she expect her feeble settlements on the western coast to resist the vast, increasing, and resistless pressure, when, with the mighty weight of our population from the Atlantic to the Rocky mountains, this wave shall pour down the Pacific slope? Her statesmen are too wise to expect it; and it is not likely that, for the sake of the little advantage which she might have in that quarter, she would expose herself to the constant hazard of a war with us. Our mutual means of annoyance are too great; our mutual interests in a reciprocal commerce are too vast for her to be willing to risk the consequences of a war for an object so petty to her, however important it might be to us.

But it has been said by some gentlemen that Great Britain possesses as great facilities for colonization in Oregon as we do; and it has been apprehended that she might give this new direction to the tide of her emigration. I have no fears upon this subject.

I reason from the past to the future. If she has not done it heretofore, it is not likely that she will do it hereafter. She can have no stronger inducements to this policy for the future than she has already had in the past. Emigrants from the Old World would no more suit Oregon than Oregon would suit them. It is only by a people trained like our western pioneers, that this territory can ever be reduced to the permanent use and occupation of man. The superiority of our means for colonization is already evinced by the difference in the character of the settlements of the two countries. Our people do not go to Oregon to hunt and fish, and take up a temporary abode there. They go to settle the country—to cultivate and improve the soil—and to leave an inheritance to their posterity. The British settlements, on the other hand, are temporary and fugitive. They go their for hunting and for Indian trade. It is no part of the British policy to colonize Oregon; and it never will be. The fact that she rests her title on the Nootka Sound convention, and claims nothing more than the right of joint occupancy under it, would seem to indicate that she considers it as a temporary station, and looks forward to its ultimate abandonment. If this country is fit for agricultural settlements, and our people should seek it for that purpose, then by a most "manifest destiny" it must be ours.

Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL speaking across. How, if they should set up for themselves?

The honorable chairman has asked me whether the people of Oregon will set up an independent government for themselves. I have no idea that they will. If this nation shall proceed in its present course, gradually occupying and taking possession of the entire breadth of the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, we shall possess a cohesive strength, from our social organization, and physical and geographical position, which must bind us in an indissoluble union. Instead of forming separate and independent communities, our population would present to the world the glorious spectacle of a republic, the greatest and the wisest that the earth ever saw, with interests different, but not hostile, with regions distinct, indeed, but not in opposition, each ancillary to the other, and all contributing to the general strength and prosperity.

Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL, speaking across. But how, if there should be a black tariff?

Mr. H. continued. Let this state of things once come, and I tell the gentleman that we shall hear no more about the "black tariff." Open to us the vast Pacific market in addition to that which we now enjoy on the Atlantic, let the productions of the country take their natural and unrestricted course to pour themselves into both, and there will be no danger of hostile rivalry, of separation, or of a new republic setting up for itself. The ties of union would strengthen with every hour—mutual benefits and mutual interests would link us indissolubly together. There is no danger of disunion. Our greatest present danger is from rushing into a war before we are prepared for it.

Mr. Chairman, I again appeal to all candid and reflecting men from the West—to those who go for Oregon, and the whole of Oregon—to those who might desire war for Oregon, but who do not desire Oregon for war—I appeal to these men to say if the course of policy which would lead to such a consummation as I have described, be not the proper line to be pursued? If we would see this prospect realized certainly, though gradually, we must let



this controversy remain as it is. Let us not renew the negotiation; make no more offers to Great Britain; but let us trust to the process of colonization now so rapidly in progress, and we shall quietly, peaceably, and certainly obtain the whole of what we claim. I care not how glorious the war may be, it would be better to avoid it; for it is in this way alone that we may reasonably hope to obtain what gentlemen so ardently desire—"the whole of Oregon." Let things remain as they are. It would seem to be impossible that Great Britain should put an end to the joint occupancy as long as she rests her title on the Nootka Sound convention, under which she claims joint occupancy, and nothing more. In the meantime, let us go on and fill the country; let us pass such measures as, without violating the treaty, would contribute to that end; and then if we should find it necessary ultimately to go to war, we can choose our own time for doing it.

But my western friends seem disposed to reproach the South in this matter, as if it were ungrateful in them to resist that mode of obtaining Oregon which so many of them regard as the best. Nothing could pain me more than such an imputation. The South acknowledges its obligations to our western friends; we feel it, feel it deeply and strongly, and would most gladly requite it. This I believe we may do by pursuing such a course of policy as presents the only hope of obtaining all Oregon, whilst it would save us from the dangers and sacrifices of a war for which we are unprepared, and into which we must enter under circumstances less propitious than they are ever likely to be hereafter. But whilst I advocate this as the wisest and most statesmanlike policy, I trust that my western friends will understand me. Whilst in this matter I pursue the path which I have taken under convictions of duty quite as deep and strong as their own, I hope they will permit me to follow it without reproach, so long as I cast no reproaches on them for choosing a different route, which I regard as much more perilous, not only to the great interests of the country, but to our chances for the ultimate possession of Oregon. I will aid them in such measures as I believe would most certainly enable us to obtain possession of the whole country; but I cannot assist in those which would probably defeat that object.

Mr. Chairman, I am not one of those who have ever said or thought that Oregon was not worth a war. If it were a barren rock in the ocean, if it were a mere idle strip of seashore sand, the country ought to fight for it sooner than suffer itself to be dispossessed by violence. To depress the national tone, to degrade the national spirit, would be far worse than war itself. I feel the solemn responsibility which rests upon us to defend by war, even, (if war should be necessary as the only means for that purpose,) every inch of American soil, throughout the whole length of our possessions, from the extreme regions of the frozen north down to the sunny slopes which look to the burning line, throughout their whole breadth, from the rising to the setting sun, from the "steep Atlantic stream" to the far Pacific wave. But whilst we admit the truth of these sentiments, let us remember, at the same time, that war is never justifiable until it becomes necessary; and before that can be shown we must first have exhausted all honorable and proper measures to preserve our rights in peace. I maintain, sir, that there are such means at our disposal, and by adopting them we may not only avoid

the dangers of war, but probably the chance of losing Oregon.

Mr. Chairman, I will go farther. If from the action of this House, or from any other circumstances, war should occur, although there may be southern men who believe that it could have been avoided, yet I take this occasion to say to the West, that when it becomes clearly necessary and presents the only remaining mode of obtaining our rights, they will find the South standing by the country and by them with heart and hand. Yes, when that hour comes—and God grant that there may never be a necessity for it—the maxim of the gallant Decatur will find one universal acception amongst the whole American people—"our country, right or wrong." Many may be found deeply deploring, indeed, the mismanagement, or the necessity, which has plunged the country into war, but they will not pause to settle the question of responsibility until they have first done all that becomes them to preserve national rights and honor. I must, however, here declare, in a spirit of entire frankness, that if, by giving this notice, we should ultimately either lose Oregon or be led into an unnecessary war to obtain it, those who give this notice will be held responsible, at the proper time, for all its consequences. It is the undoubted duty of every section of this confederacy, North, South, East, and West, to defend the national soil, and protect the national honor. But we owe it to ourselves, to our posterity, and to the great interests of humanity, to exhaust all honorable means of peace before we plunge the nation into war. Wo to the people amongst whom war becomes a familiar and a household word, and wo to the statesman who cultivates a spirit of violence amongst those whom he influences, instead of cherishing a disposition to peace. In this connexion, Mr. Chairman, I must be permitted to express the profound regret with which I have heard some of the remarks made in this debate. There are elements enough of strife abroad in the public mind without enlisting the passions further in the work of havoc and ruin. It was with the deepest regret that I heard members upon this floor taunting the administration, and declaring the belief that it would "back out," and that it could not be "kicked into a war." These sounds fell on my ear like the echoes of something of which I had heard before, and which contributed to the same result upon another occasion—a result for which a necessity then existed, however unfortunate it might be now.

There never was, there never can be, an administration elected by the people of this country, which could refuse a war, if national rights and honor required it. None but a timid administration can be "kicked into a war" by domestic opponents. It requires far more courage to resist a war cry than to yield to it. It sometimes requires more moral firmness and greater and higher qualities of mind to withstand the first outburst of the war feeling, and calmly to appeal to the sober second thought of a reflecting people for ultimate instructions, than to be the hero of a hundred fields.

Mr. Chairman, I will now say, and I desire my words to be noted, that if any gentleman here believes that this notice will lead to war, and yet votes for it under the hope that the President will back out sooner than face the result, he is utterly mistaken. This administration will not back out from any position which it has taken in the face of the

world, and before the American people. Whoever, therefore, votes for this measure, foreseeing, but not desiring its consequences, will be far more responsible for the result, in a moral point of view, than the administration which has acted, as I believe, from an honest though erroneous conviction of duty.

Mr. Chairman, I will conclude by observing, that I am fully aware that nothing which I can say will influence the action of this House. I never expected that it would. But I have presented my views upon this subject fully and frankly, in order that I may place myself fairly before my constituents and friends, who alone feel an interest in my course. My sole aim has been to vindicate myself with them. Would to God that I had the power to reach the heart of the House and the nation! Would to God that I could persuade them to beware, ere they precipitated themselves into a war, and exposed themselves to consequences which no eye but that above can measure or pursue. I would beseech my countrymen first to exhaust all the means of preserving peace with honor. They owe

this to themselves and their posterity, to the character of the country, to the hopes of our race, and the great interests of humanity. If these measures should fail, and war should become inevitable, we should go into it a united people, with one heart and with one mind. We should go into it with those high feelings with which conscious rectitude, and an outraged spirit can alone inspire a man or a people. We should carry with us the sympathies of Christendom; and, more than all, we might devoutly invoke the blessing of the God of battles in a contest which we had alone nothing to provoke, and we had sought by all honorable means to avert. If war should become the only remedy for wounded honor and violated right, all will rally to the rescue of the country, and to avenge its wrongs. As devoted as any in the glorious band, I will venture to say, the sons of the South will be found at the post of duty—not standing by, as cold-hearted spectators, or as laggards in the day of trial. No, sir; they will be found

True to the last of their blood and their breath.  
And like reapers descend to the harvest of death.

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